



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

Administrative Office
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Bldg. 1, Room E-316
Charleston, West Virginia 25305
(304) 340-2305 Jennifer Bundy
(304) 340-2306 April Harless
(304) 558-4219 / TTY
(304) 558-1212 / FAX
Web Site: www.courtswv.gov
Twitter: [WVCourts](https://twitter.com/WVCourts)
Information Services Division
Email: Jennifer.Bundy@courtswv.gov
Email: April.Harless@courtswv.gov

Justice Davis, Judge Moats say truancy improving, challenges still exist

For immediate release Monday, September 10, 2012

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Supreme Court Justice Robin Jean Davis today released a report based on a survey of circuit judges in West Virginia which indicates that half the judges have changed the way they handle truancy cases in the last year.

She released the report at a legislative interim committee meeting at 10 a.m. in the House Judiciary Committee Room. Nineteenth Judicial Circuit (Barbour and Taylor Counties) Judge Alan Moats also spoke to the committee about judicial truancy efforts.

In August, the Supreme Court's Division of Children's Services surveyed circuit judges about their truancy programs. This survey is part of an ongoing effort to assess West Virginia courts' anti-truancy efforts.

According to the report, slightly more than half of the judges (54.8 percent) had a truancy program before Justice Davis and Judge Moats and began holding regional community meetings on truancy in October 2011. Fifty percent said they have changed the way they handle truancy cases since then. Also, 45.2 percent said a judge now monitors or reviews local statistics on truancy.

About 26 percent of the judges said their circuits have school-based probation officers. Several judges said involving probation officers in truancy works; Justice Davis said the court system hopes to expand that effort.

Judges who changed how they handle truancy cases reported there is now more local collaboration, children now typically miss fewer days before a court action is filed, and the number of truancy actions has increased.

"The judges all generally said that attendance and student achievement have a direct correlation, which I'm sure is no surprise to anyone," Justice Davis said.

The judges reported many student success stories.

When asked about challenges, the most frequent theme in the judges' responses was that there is a lack of resources and a need for more services for status offenders. Students, especially in rural areas, need transportation to court and to counseling. And judges would like youth services workers to have higher salaries to reduce turnover.

Judge Moats emphasized the societal costs of truancy. Students who miss school are lost when they return, and so often end up dropping out. Forty years ago, the United States had the world's highest graduation rate, now it is ranked twenty-first.

Nationally, eighty percent of dropouts end up in prison at some point in their lives, Judge Moats said. In 1991, West Virginia had 1,600 people in state prison; at the end of August 2012 it was about 7,000.

Generally, people who drop out of school tend not to care if their children attend, Judge Moats said. During the last school year in Barbour County, 92 percent of the dropouts had at least one parent who also was a dropout, according to information provided by the county attendance director.

Judge Moats said educators and judicial officers can track and monitor children, but the community and Department of Health and Human Resources have to do their part.

“We need the services in the home,” he said. “We don’t have enough resources.” He said he agreed with other judges that there need to be more DHHR case workers and they need to be paid more so there is less turnover.

“The ones that are there do a wonderful job. That’s where you all can help,” he told the legislators.

##